



Bulgarian SPA designation and protection

Irreversible and widespread damage to Natura 2000 sites: need for further urgent Commission action

We strongly welcome the Commission's recent decision to send Bulgaria a first written warning for insufficient Special Protection Area (SPA) designation, which we see as a key step. We do, however, remain seriously concerned about the extent of damage to SPAs/potential SPAs that is currently occurring. We therefore urge the Commission to take further urgent action to ensure that sites are not damaged further before Natura 2000 designation is completed.

In September 2007 BSPB submitted a complaint to the Commission concerning both the inadequate designation and protection of (SPAs) in Bulgaria generally under the EU Birds Directive. This included information about the damage occurring in many of the SPAs. In February 2008, BSPB submitted a second complaint on the specific case of Kaliakra potential SPA, which was supported by 12 other Bulgarian nature conservation NGOs. In late May we provided further detailed information about the damage that has already taken place to Kaliakra and the further damage likely by developments in progress.

While the NGOs are pleased that the Commission are investigating the issue of inadequate site protection/site deterioration we are extremely concerned that the situation in Bulgaria is now so serious that unless the Commission takes further urgent action there will be widespread destruction of protected natural heritage for which Bulgaria has a European obligation. By the time the designation process has been completed many sites will have been seriously damaged. Given that it is now 18 months since Bulgaria joined the EU this is totally unacceptable and we are very worried that the situation in Bulgaria could be repeated in Romania.

Bulgaria's actions are in direct conflict with assurances the Bulgarian Environment Minister gave to the European Parliament in 14 September 2006 and are putting the coherence of the entire Natura 2000 network at risk. Given the considerable number of Parliamentary Questions that have already been asked about Bulgarian Natura 2000 designation this is clearly an issue also of interest to MEPs.

A selection of examples of inadequate site protection/site deterioration are given below. However, the problems are not restricted to these sites. Similar damage is occurring in at least 55 potential SPAs right across Bulgaria. Pressure on the approved SPAs from proposed investment projects continues to increase. In most of the cases the investment projects are related to building of summer villages, hotels, golf-courses, ski-runs, extraction of sand, gravel, stones, wind farm and micro-hydropower stations construction.

COMMISSION ACTION NEEDED: the Commission should make it very clear to the Bulgarian authorities:

- That the sites should be designated and properly protected as soon as possible;
- That the Commission will expect Bulgaria to compensate for damage caused to sites after 1 January 2007 at which time Bulgaria should have been complying with EC nature laws; and
- That the Commission may withhold EU funds from Bulgaria if compliance with the nature directives is not adequate.

For more information please contact:

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